

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office  
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete).

**VA PROPERTIES FOR SALE:** Effective May 12, 2006, VA is no longer offering properties for lease to FEMA Certified Disaster Victims. For information on VA repossessed properties for sale see [www.ocwen.com](http://www.ocwen.com).

**VA SELECTS SARASOTA COUNTY NATIONAL CEMETERY SITE** (VA News Release May 19, 2006)  
WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has selected a 466-acre property in Sarasota County as the site for a new national cemetery in west central Florida. VA recently completed environmental assessments of three possible cemetery sites and the Secretary made his decision after considering the viability of each site. The property to be acquired is part of a larger property known as the Hawkins Ranch and is located four miles east of Interstate 75, southeast of the City of Sarasota. Funding for the purchase of the land was appropriated in the fiscal year '06 budget and additional funding will be necessary for the design and construction phases. The cemetery is anticipated to open for burials between late 2008 and mid-2009.

At least 378,000 veterans live within 75 miles of the site. The closest VA cemetery in Florida, open to casket and cremated remains, is Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, Florida, which is about 110 miles from the city of Sarasota.

Veterans whose discharges are other than dishonorable, their spouses and dependent children may be buried in a national cemetery, regardless of where they live. No advance reservations are made. Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from a VA Web site at [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov) or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.

**VA INITIATIVE AGAINST OBESITY, DIABETES ADVANCES** (VA News Release May 12, 2006) VA announced the launch of a national registration campaign to let veterans and their families tailor their diets and exercise programs into a healthful lifestyle. The new health care assessment is part of a campaign called MOVE – Managing Obesity/Overweight for Veterans Everywhere – which is part

of the HealthierUS Veterans program sponsored by the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) to reduce obesity and diabetes, a disease often associated with being overweight.

Patients enrolled in VA's health care program can complete an interactive on-line questionnaire about their health status, nutrition and exercise. Based on their information, veterans and family members receive a custom report with health information and instructions for follow up with the staff of a VA medical center.

People not enrolled in VA's health care program can log into [www.move.va.gov/move23.asp](http://www.move.va.gov/move23.asp) and answer 23 questions. They will receive an individualized report giving them suggestions about making changes in their eating and physical activity and referring them to materials on the Web site.

VA medical centers nationwide are starting an aggressive effort to counsel and follow up with patients who express interest in managing their weight. VA estimates that 70 percent of its patients are overweight, compared to 64 percent of the U.S. population. Diabetes also affects a greater percentage of veterans in VA's health care than the general U.S. population.

## **HEALTH CARE FOR COMBAT VETERANS FACT SHEET** (Created June 24, 2005 revised June 30, 2005)

**Introduction:** The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides cost-free health care services and nursing home care for conditions possibly related to military service to veterans with combat service after November 11, 1998 for a period of 2 years beginning on the date of their separation from active military service.

**Who's eligible:** Veterans, including activated Reservists and National Guard members, are eligible if they served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Gulf War or in combat against a hostile force during a period of "hostilities" after November 11, 1998 and have been discharged under other than dishonorable conditions.

**What's meant by "hostilities:"** "Hostilities" is defined as conflict in which Armed Forces members are subjected to the danger comparable to that faced in a period of war. For purposes of establishing this special eligibility VA accepts service documentation that reflects service in a combat theater, receipt of combat service medals and/or receipt of imminent danger or hostile fire pay or tax benefits.

**What are combat veterans eligible for:** Public Law 105-368 [Title 38 USC 1710(d)(D)] authorizes VA to provide combat veterans cost-free care for conditions potentially related to their combat service for up to two years following their discharge or release from active duty. These veterans will be enrolled into Enrollment Priority Group 6 if not otherwise qualified for a higher enrollment priority group assignment. VA provides full access to the Medical Benefits Package by virtue of this enrollment status.

**What happens after the post two year authority expires? What about combat veterans who do not enroll during this post two year period?** Veterans who enroll with VA under this authority will retain enrollment eligibility even after their two-year post discharge period ends under current enrollment policies. In other words, at the end of that two year period VA will reassess the veteran's information (including all applicable eligibility factors) and make a new enrollment decision. If the veteran was in Priority Group 6 and no other eligibility factors apply then he/she will continue enrollment in either Priority Group 7 or Priority Group 8 depending on their income level and required to make applicable copayments.

For those veterans who do not enroll with VA during this post two-year discharge period, eligibility for enrollment and subsequent care is based on other factors such as a compensable service connection rating, VA pension status, catastrophic disability determination or the veteran's financial circumstances.

**Co pays** Veterans who qualify under this special eligibility are not subject to copay requirements for conditions potentially related to their combat service.

**Dental Care:** Eligibility for VA dental benefits is based on very specific guidelines and differs significantly from eligibility requirements for medical care.

**To get additional information:** Veterans can call the nearest VA Medical Facility or the Health Benefit Service Center at 1-877-222-8387. Veterans may also visit the VA health benefits website: [www.va.gov/healtheligibility](http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility).

#### **IMPORTANT DATES IN JUNE**

**June 1** payments for May due

**June 8** last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 06-30-2006 payments

**June 21** last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 06-30-2006 payments

**June 30** payments for June due

#### **VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

**VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg** - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

**Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA** (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 **1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications **1-877-823-2378**

**Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline** (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

**VA EFT Information Hotline** (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

**VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia** (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

**VA Health Administration Center** (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -  
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023  
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024  
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

**Foreign Medical Program Office** (medical treatment abroad) -  
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

**National Cemeteries**  
10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**  
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**  
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

**National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs** (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

**Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center** (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 **1-888-244-6711**

**Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit** - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

#### **INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:**

VA Web Site: [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

VA Forms: [www.va.gov/vaforms](http://www.va.gov/vaforms)

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) [www.warms.vba.va.gov](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov)

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessioned homes): [www.ocwen.com](http://www.ocwen.com)

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: [www.floridavets.org](http://www.floridavets.org)

St. Pete Regional Office: [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete)